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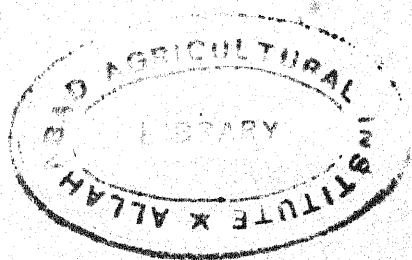
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# MODERN SHORT STORIES

(Approved Short Story Book for Intermediate Classes)

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by  
K. P. Rastogi  
Y. M. Rai



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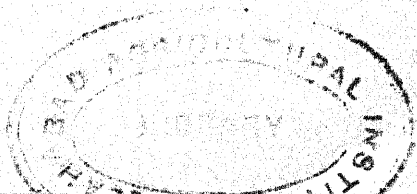
## P R E F A C E

This selection of short stories has been designed for the students of Intermediate classes. The book includes stories written by some of the greatest masters of the art. Most of the stories are by Indian writers. Indian students are expected to show a better appreciation for the stories that depict the life around them.

While standard authors have been chosen, an effort has been made to break fresh ground and offer new reading material. The editors have tried to cater to different tastes and have, therefore, chosen stories covering different modes of life.

An Introduction has been given in the beginning to familiarise the students with the development of the short story and its main points. At the end of the book are given notes along with short introductory pieces about the writers.

- Rastogi  
Rai





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

*We are grateful to the owners of copyright  
materials whose works have been  
included in this selection.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The short story is the most ancient form of literature. It is as old as mankind. The desire to tell stories and to listen to them is inherent in human nature. Children all over the world, ever since they learn to speak, come out with a cry, 'Tell us a story.' This cry has an echo in the grown-up persons also. That is why there has never been any time in any country when the short story has not been popular. Primitive people used to sit around the jungle-fire to listen to a story told by one of them gifted in the art. Even now people sit by the hearth in winter evenings to fill their dull hours with a charm by telling or by listening to a story.

The great teachers like Jesus Christ and Gautam Buddha made story or parable a means to explain the truths of religion to the people. The mythology of every country is full of stories of gods and men. But the short story as it is known today, is a bit different from the Buddhist 'Jataks' or from the parables of Christ.

The modern short story is a conscious art. It has its own technique and artistic design. A story, if it claims to be a thing of art, must be a compact, well rounded whole and must leave on the mind of the reader, what Edgar Allen Poe called "an effect of totality."

Writers have defined short story in so many different ways. Sir Hugh Walpole has said, "A short story should be a story: a record of things and happenings full of incident and accident, swift movement, unexpected development, leading through suspense to a climax and a satisfying denouement."

Wells declares that, "Any piece of short fiction which could be read in twenty minutes would be a short story." Chekhov maintains that, "A short story should have neither beginning nor end." On the other hand Mr. Ellery Sedgewick asserts that, "A short story is like a horse-race. It is the start and finish that count most." And he continues: "The short story has become all sorts of things, situation, episode, characterization, or narrative—in effect a vehicle for every man's talent."

As the writers differ in their definitions of the short story; so also do they differ in their way of writing them. The variety of short story is as infinite as life itself. There are stories which are romantic like 'The Victory'; stories which are psychological like 'The Lost Child'; stories which depict the village life like 'God Lives In the Panch'; stories which tell us how an incident can make or mar our life like 'The Diamond Necklace'; stories which show that chance plays an important part in life like 'The Astrologer's Day'; stories which give us some instruction like 'Three Questions'; and stories of horror and terror like 'The Monkey's Paw'.

The short story is the most popular form of literary art today for it gives us the experiences of life in a short and concise form. Man is so busy that he has no time for reading big novels or dramas. He is satisfied by the gist a writer gives him in the form of a sweet and pleasing story.

*Rastogi  
Rai*

## 1. THE LOST CHILD

It was the festival of Spring. From the wintry shades of narrow lanes and alleys emerged a gaily clad humanity, thick as a crowd of bright-coloured rabbits issuing from a warren, and entering the flooded sea of sparkling silver sunshine outside the city gates, sped towards the fair. Some walked, some rode on horses, others sat, being carried in bamboo and bullock-carts. One little boy ran between his parent's legs, brimming over with life and laughter, as the joyous smiling morning, with its open greetings and unashamed invitations to come away into fields, full of flowers and songs.

"Come, child, come," called his parents, as he lagged behind, arrested by the toys in the shops that lined the way.

He hurried towards his parents, his feet obedient to their call, his eyes still lingering on the receding toys. As he came to where they had stopped to wait for him, he could not suppress the desire of his heart, even though he well knew the old, cold stare of refusal in their eyes.

"I want that toy," he pleaded.

His father looked at him red-eyed in his familiar tyrant's way. His mother, melted by the free spirit

of the day, was tender, and giving him her finger to catch, said :

“Look, child, what is before you !”

The faint disgust of the child's unfulfilled desire had hardly been quelled in the heavy, pouting sob of a breath, “M—o—th—e—r”, when the pleasure of what was before him filled his eager eyes. They had left the dusty road on which they had walked so far to wend its weary way circuitously to the north, and had entered a foot-path in a field.

It was a flowering mustard-field, pale, pale, like melting gold, as it swept across miles and miles of even land, a river of yellow light, ebbing and falling with each fresh eddy of wild wind, and straying at places into broad, rich tributary streams, yet running in a constant sunny sweep towards the distant mirage of an ocean of silvery light. Where it ended, on a side stood a dense group of low mud-walled houses put into relief both by the lower forms of a denser crowd of yellow-robed men and women and by high-pitched sequence of whistling, creaking, squeaking, roaring, humming noises that rose from it, across the groves, to the blue-throated sky like the weird, strange sound of Shiva's mad laughter.

The child looked up to his father and mother, saturated with the shrill joy and wonder of this vast glory, and feeling that they too wore the evidence of this pure delight in their faces, left the foot-path

and plunged headlong into the field, walking like a young colt, his small feet chiming with the fitful gusts of wind that came winnowing from the fragrance of more distant fields.

A group of dragon-flies were bustling about on their gaudy, purple wings, intercepting the flight of a lone black bee or butterfly in search of sweet perfume from the hearts of flowers. The child followed them in the air, with his gaze, till one of them would fold its wings and sit down and he would try to catch it. But it would go, fluttering, flapping, hovering in the air, when he had almost caught it in his hands. One bold black bee, having evaded capture, sought to tempt him by whining round his ear, and nearly settled on his lips, when his mother made a cautionary call :

"Come, child, come ; come on the foot-path."

He went towards his parents gaily, and walked abreast of them for a while, being, however, soon left behind, attracted by the little insects and worms along the foot-path that were coming out teeming from their hiding-places to enjoy the sunshine.

"Come, child, come," his parents called from the shade of a grove where they had seated themselves on the edge of a well. He ran towards them.

An old banyan tree outstretched its powerful arms over the blossoming jack and *jaman* and *neem*



and *champak* and *serisha*, and cast its shadows across beds of golden cassia and crimson *gulmohur*, as an old grandmother spreads her skirts over her young ones. The blushing blossoms freely offered their adoration to the sun, however, in spite of their protecting chaperon, by half uncovering themselves; and the sweet perfume of their pollen mingled with the soft, cool breeze that came and went in little puffs, only to be wafted aloft by a stronger gush.

A shower of young flowers fell upon the child as he entered the grove, and forgetting his parents, he began to gather the raining petals in his hands, but lo ! he heard the cooing of the doves and ran towards his parents, shouting : "The dove! the dove !" The raining petals dropped from his forgotten hands. A curious look was in his parents' faces, till a *koel* struck out a note of love and released their pent-up souls.

"Come, child, come," they called to the child who had now gone running in a wild caper round the banyan tree and, gathering him, they took the narrow, winding foot-path which led to the fair from the mustard-fields.

As they neared the village, the child could see many other foot-paths full of throngs converging to the whirlpool of the fair, and felt at once repelled and fascinated by the confusion of the world he was entering.

A sweet-meat-seller hawked, "*Gulab-jaman, rasgulla, burfi, jalebi,*" at the corner of the entrance, and a crowd pressed round his counter at the foot of an architecture of many-coloured sweets, decorated with leaves of silver and gold. The child stared open-eyed, and his mouth watered for the *burfi* that was his favourite sweet. "I want that *burfi*," he slowly murmured. But he half knew as he made the request that it would not be heeded, because his parents would say he was greedy. So without waiting for an answer, he moved on.

A flower-seller hawked, "A garland of *gulgul*, a garland of *gulgul*." The child seemed irresistibly drawn by the implacable sweetness of the scent that came floating on the wings of the languid air. He went towards the basket where the flowers lay heaped and half murmured, "I want that garland"; but he well knew his parents would refuse to buy him these flowers because they would say they were cheap. So without waiting for an answer, he moved on.

A man stood holding a pole with yellow, red, green and purple balloons flying from it. The child was simply carried away by the rainbow glory of their silken colours, and he was possessed by an overwhelming desire to possess them all. But he well knew his parents would never buy him balloons, because they would say he was too



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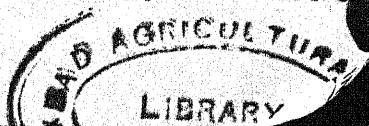
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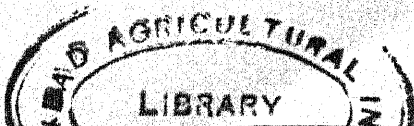
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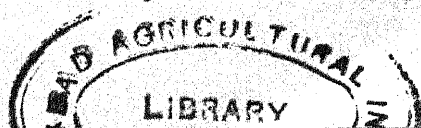
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play with such toys. So he walked further.

A juggler stood playing a flute to a snake which coiled itself in a basket, its head raised in a graceful bend like the neck of a swan while the music stole into its invisible ears like the gentle rippling of a miniature water-fall. The child went towards the juggler. But knowing his parents had forbidden him to hear such coarse music as the jugglers play, he proceeded farther.

There was a roundabout in full swing. Men, women and children, carried in a whirling motion shrieked and cried with dizzy laughter. The child watched them intently going round and round, a pink blush of a smile on his face, his eyes rippling with the same movement, his lips half-parted in amazement, till he felt himself being carried round. The ring seemed to go fiercely at first, then gradually it began to move less fast. Presently, the child, rapt, his finger in his mouth, beheld it stop. This time, before his overpowering love of his anticipated sensation of movement had been chilled by the fact of his parents' eternal denial, he made a bold request: "I want to go on the roundabout, please, father, mother !"

There was no reply. He turned to look at his parents. They were not there, ahead of him. He turned to look on the sides. They were not there. He looked behind. There was no sign of them.

A full deep cry arose within his dry throat, and with a sudden jerk of his body he ran from where he stood, crying in a red fear, "Mother, father." Tears rained down from his eyes, heavy and fierce, his flushed face was convulsed with fear. Panic-stricken, he ran to one side first, then to the other, before and after in all directions, knowing not where to go. "Mother, father," he wailed, with a moist, shrill breath now, his throat being wet, with the swallowing of his spittle. His yellow turban became untied, and his clothes, wet with perspiration, became muddy where the dust had mixed with the sweat of his body. His light frame seemed heavy as a mass of lead.

Having run to and fro in a sheer rage of running for a while, he stood defeated, his cries suppressed into sobs. At little distances on the green grass he could see, through his filmy eyes, men and women talking. He tried to look intensively among the patches of bright yellow clothes but there was no sign of his father and mother among these people, who seemed to laugh and talk just for the sake of laughing and talking. He ran hotly again, this time to a shrine to which people seemed to be crowding. Every inch of space here was congested with men, but he ran through people's legs, his little sob lingering, "Mother, father." Near the entrance of the temple, however, the crowd became very thick : men

jostled each other—heavy men with flashing, murderous eyes and hefty shoulders. The poor child, struggled to carve a way between their feet, but, knocked to and fro by their brutal paws, he might have been trampled under foot had he not shrieked at the highest pitch of his voice, "F—ather, mother." A man in the surging crowd heard his groan, and stooping with very great difficulty, lifted him up in his arms.

"How did you get here, child ? Whose baby are you ?" the man asked as he steered clear of the mass.

The child wept more bitterly than ever now and only cried, "I want my mother, I want my father."

The man tried to soothe him by taking him up to the roundabout. "Will you have a lift on the horses ?" he gently asked as he approached the ring.

The child's throat tore into a thousand shrill sobs and he only shouted, "I want my mother, I want my father."

The man headed towards the place where the juggler still played on the flute to the dancing cobra.

"Listen to that nice music, child," he pleaded.

But the child shut his ears with his fingers and shouted in his double-pitched strain, "I want my mother, I want my father."

The man took him near the balloons thinking the bright colours of the balls would distract the child's

attention and quieten him. "Would you like a rainbow-coloured balloon ?" he persuasively asked.

But the child turned his eyes from the flying balloons and just sobbed, "I want my mother, I want my father."

The man, still importunate in his kindly desire to make the child happy, bore him to the gate where the flower-seller stood. "Look ! can you smell these nice flowers, child ? Would you like a garland to put round your neck ?"

The child turned his nose away from the basket and reiterated his sob, "I want my mother, I want my father."

Thinking to humour his disconsolate find by a gift of sweets, the man took him to the counter of the sweet-shop. "What sweets would you like, child ?" he asked.

The child turned his face from the sweet-shop and only sobbed, "I want my mother, I want my father."

—*Mulk Raj Anand.*

## 2. THE DIAMOND NECKLACE

She was one of those pretty and charming young girls who sometimes are born, as if by slip of fate, into a family of clerks. She had no dowry, no expectations, no way of being known, understood, loved and wedded by any rich and distinguished man ; so she let herself be married to a little clerk of the Ministry of Public Instruction.

She dressed plainly because she could not dress well, but she was as unhappy as if she had really fallen from a higher station ; since with women there is neither caste nor rank, for beauty, grace and charm take the place of birth and breeding. Natural ingenuity, instinct for what is elegant, a supple mind are their sole hierarchy, and often make of women of the people the equals of the very greatest ladies.

Mathilde suffered ceaselessly, feeling herself born to enjoy all delicacies and all luxuries. She was distressed at the poverty of her dwelling, at the bareness of the walls, at the shabby chairs, the ugliness of the curtains. All those things, of which another woman of her rank would never even have been conscious, tortured her and made her angry. The sight of the little Breton peasant who did her humble housework aroused in her despairing regrets and

bewildering dreams. She thought of silent ante chambers hung with Oriental tapestry, illumined by tall bronze candelabra, and of two great footmen in knee breeches who sleep in the big armchairs, made drowsy by the oppressive heat of the stove. She thought of long reception halls hung with ancient silk, of the dainty cabinets containing priceless curiosities and of little coquettish perfumed reception rooms made for chatting at five o'clock with intimate friends, with men famous and sought after; whom all women envy and whose attention they all desire.

When she sat down to dinner, before the round table covered with a tablecloth in use three days, opposite her husband, who uncovered the soup tureen and declared with a delighted air, "Ah, the good soup ! I don't know anything better than that" she thought of dainty dinners, of shining silverware, of tapestry that peopled the walls with ancient personages and with strange birds flying in the midst of a fairy forest ; and she thought of delicious dishes served on marvellous plates and of the whispered gallantries to which you listen with a sphinx-like smile while you are eating the wings of a quail.

She had no gowns, no jewels, nothing. And she loved nothing but that. She felt that she was made for that. She would have liked so much to please, to be envied, to be charming, to be sought after.

She had a friend, a former schoolmate at the convent, who was rich, and whom she did not like to go to see any more because she felt so sad when she came home.

But one evening her husband came home with a triumphant air, holding a large envelope in his hand.

"There," said he, "there is something for you."

She tore the paper quickly and drew out a printed card which bore these words:

"The Minister of Public Instruction and Madame Georges Ramponneau request the pleasure of Monsieur and Madame Loisel's company at the Ministry on Monday evening, January, 18th."

Instead of being delighted, as her husband had hoped, she threw the invitation on the table crossly, muttering :

"What do you wish me to do with that ?"

"Why, my dear, I thought you would be glad. You never go out, and this is such a fine opportunity. I had great trouble to get it. Everyone wants to go ; it is very select, and they are not giving many invitations to clerks. The whole official world will be there."

She looked at him with an irritated glance and said impatiently :

"And what do you wish me to put on my back ?"

He had not thought of that. He stammered :

"Why, the gown you go to the theatre in. It looks very well to me."

He stopped, distracted, seeing that his wife was weeping. Two great tears ran slowly from the corners of her eyes towards the corners of her mouth.

"What's the matter ? What's the matter ?" he asked.

By a violent effort she conquered her grief and replied in a calm voice, while she wiped away her tears :

"Nothing. Only I have no gown, and therefore, I can't go to this ball. Give your card to some colleague whose wife is better equipped than I am."

He was in despair. He resumed :

"Come, let us see, Mathilde. How much would it cost, a suitable gown, which you could use on other occasions—something very simple ?"

She reflected several seconds, making her calculations and wondering also what sum she could ask without drawing on herself an immediate refusal and a frightened exclamation from the economical clerk.

Finally she replied hesitatingly :

"I don't know exactly, but I think I could manage it with four hundred francs."

He grew a little pale, because he was laying aside just that amount to buy a gun and treat himself to a little shooting next summer on the plain of Nanterre, with several friends who went to shoot



larks there on a Sunday.

But he said :

"Very well. I will give you four hundred francs. And try to have a pretty gown."

The day of the ball drew near and Madame Loisel seemed sad, uneasy, anxious. Her frock was ready, however. Her husband said to her one evening :

"What is the matter ? Come, you have seemed very queer these last three days."

And she answered :

"It annoys me not to have a single piece of jewellery, not a single ornament, nothing to put on. I shall look poverty-stricken. I would almost rather not go at all."

"You might wear natural flowers," said her husband. "They're quite fashionable at this time of year. For ten francs you can get two or three magnificent roses."

She was not convinced.

"No ; there's nothing more humiliating than to look poor among other women who are rich."

"How stupid you are !" her husband cried. "Go and look up your friend, Madame Forestier, and ask her to lend you some jewels. You're intimate enough with her to do that."

She uttered a cry of joy :

"True ! I never thought of it."

The next day she went to her friend and told her of her distress.

Madame Forestier went to a wardrobe with a mirror, took out a large jewel box, brought it back, opened it and said to Madame Loisel:

"Choose, my dear."

She saw first some bracelets, then a pearl necklace, then a Venetian gold cross with precious stones, of admirable workmanship. She tried on the ornaments before the mirror, hesitated and could not make up her mind to part with them, to give them back. She kept asking :

"Haven't you any more ?"

"Why, yes. Look further : I don't know what you like."

Suddenly she discovered, in a black satin box, a superb diamond necklace, and her heart throbbed with an immoderate desire. Her hands trembled as she took it. She fastened it round her throat, and was lost in ecstasy at her reflection in the mirror.

Then she asked, hesitating, filled with anxious doubt :

"Will you lend me this, only this ?"

"Why, yes, certainly."

She threw her arms round her friend's neck, kissed her passionately, and then fled with her treasure.

The night of the ball arrived. Madame Loisel was a great success. She was prettier than any other

woman present, elegant, graceful, smiling and filled with joy. All the men looked at her, asked her name, sought to be introduced. All the attaches of the Cabinet wished to waltz with her. She was remarked by the minister himself.

She danced with rapture, with passion, intoxicated by pleasure, forgetting all in the triumph of her beauty, in the glory of her success, in a sort of cloud of happiness composed of all this homage and admiration, and of that sense of triumph which is so sweet to woman's heart.

She left the ball about four o'clock in the morning. Her husband had been sleeping since midnight in a little deserted anteroom with three other gentlemen whose wives were enjoying the ball.

He threw over her shoulders the wraps he had brought, the modest wraps of common life, the poverty of which contrasted with the elegance of the ball dress. She felt this and wished to escape so as not to be remarked by the other women, who were enveloping themselves in costly furs.

Loisel held back, saying : "Wait a bit. You will catch cold outside. I will call a cab."

But she did not listen to him and rapidly descended the stairs. When they reached the street they could not find a carriage and began to look for one, shouting after the cabmen passing at a distance.

They went towards the Seine in despair, shivering

with cold. At last they found on the quay one of those ancient night cabs which, as though they were ashamed to show their shabbiness during the day, are never seen round Paris until after dark.

It took them to their dwelling in the Rue des Martyrs, and sadly they mounted the stairs to their flat. All was ended for her. As to him, he reflected that he must be at the ministry at ten o'clock that morning.

She removed her wraps before the glass so as to see herself once more in all her glory. But suddenly she uttered a cry. She no longer had the necklace round her neck.

"What is the matter with you ?" demanded her husband, already half undressed.

She turned distractedly towards him.

"I have—I have—I've lost Madame Forestier's necklace."—she cried.

He stood up, bewildered.

"What !—how ? Impossible !"

They looked among the folds of her skirt, of her cloak, in her pockets, everywhere, but did not find it.

"You're sure you had it on when you left the ball ?" he asked.

"Yes, I felt it in the vestibule of the minister's house."

"But if you had lost it in the street we should have heard it fall. It must be in the cab."

"Yes, probably. Did you take his number ?"

"No. And you—didn't you notice it ?"

"No."

They looked, thunderstruck, at each other. At last Loisel put on his clothes.

"I shall go back on foot," said he, "over the whole route, to see whether I can find it."

He went out. She sat waiting on a chair in her ball dress, without strength to go to bed, overwhelmed, without any fire, without a thought.

Her husband returned about seven o'clock. He had found nothing.

He went to the police. He put an advertisement in the newspapers offering a reward ; he went to the cab companies—everywhere, in fact, whither he was urged by the least spark of hope.

She waited all day, in the same condition of mad fear before this terrible calamity.

Loisel returned at night with a hollow, pale face. He had discovered nothing.

"You must write to your friend," said he, "that you have broken the clasp of her necklace and that you are having it mended. That will give us time to turn round."

She wrote at his dictation.

At the end of a week they had lost all hope. Loisel, who had aged five years, declared:

"We must consider how to replace that ornament."

The next day they took the box that had contained it and went to the jeweller whose name was found within. He consulted his books.

"It was not I, madame, who sold that necklace; I must simply have furnished the case."

Then they went from jeweller to jeweller, searching for a necklace like the other, trying to recall it, both with chagrin and grief.

They found, in a shop at the Palais Royal, a string of diamonds that seemed to them exactly like the one they had lost. It was worth forty thousand francs. They could have it for thirty-six.

So they begged the jeweller not to sell it for three days yet. And they made a bargain that he should buy it back for thirty-four thousand francs, in case they should find the lost necklace before the end of February.

Loisel possessed eighteen thousand francs which his father had left him. He would borrow the rest.

He did borrow, asking a thousand francs of one, five hundred of another, five louis here, three louis there. He gave notes, took up ruinous obligations, dealt with usurers and all the race of lenders. He compromised all the rest of his life, risked signing a note without even knowing whether he could meet it; and, frightened by the trouble yet to come, by the black misery that was about to fall upon him, by the prospect of all the physical privations and moral

tortures that he was to suffer, he went to get the new necklace, laying upon the jeweller's counter thirtysix thousand francs.

When Madame Loisel took back the necklace Madame Forestier said to her with a chilly manner:

"You should have returned it sooner; I might have needed it."

She did not open the case, as her friend had so much feared. If she had detected the substitution, what would she have thought, what would she have said? Would she not have taken Madame Loisel for a thief?

Thereafter Madame Loisel knew the horrible existence of the needy. She bore her part, however, with sudden heroism. That dreadful debt must be paid. She would pay it. They dismissed their servant; they changed their lodgings; they rented a garret under the roof.

She came to know what heavy housework meant and the odious cares of the kitchen. She washed the dishes, using her dainty fingers and rosy nails on greasy pots and pans. She washed the soiled linen, the shirts and dish-cloths, which she dried upon a line; she took the slops down to the street every morning and carried up the water, stopping for breath at every landing. And dressed like a woman of the people, she went to the fruiterer, the grocer, the butcher, a basket on her arm, bargaining, meeting

with impertinence, defending her miserable money, sou by sou.

Every month they had to meet some notes, renew others, obtain more time.

Her husband worked in the evenings, making up a tradesman's accounts, and late at night he often copied manuscript for five sous a page.

This life lasted ten years.

At the end of ten years they had paid everything, everything with the rates of usury and the accumulations of the compound interest.

Madame Loisel looked old now. She had become the woman of impoverished households—strong and hard and rough. With frowzy hair, skirts askew and red hands, she talked loud while washing the floor with great swishes of water. But sometimes, when her husband was at the office, she sat down near the window and thought of the gay evening of long ago, of that ball where she had looked so beautiful and been so much admired.

What would have happened if she had not lost that necklace? Who knows? Who knows? How strange and changeable is life! How small a thing is needed to make or ruin us!

But one Sunday, having gone to take a walk in the Champs Elysees to refresh herself after the labours of the week, she suddenly saw a woman who was leading a child. It was Madame Forestier, still



young, still beautiful, still charming.

Madame Loisel felt moved. Should she speak to her? Yes, certainly. And now that she had paid, she would tell her all about it. Why not?

She went up.

"Good day, Jeanne."

The other, astonished to be familiarly addressed by this plain goodwife, did not recognize her at all and stammered:

"But—madame!—I do not know—You must be mistaken."

"No, I am Mathilde Loisel."

Her friend uttered a cry.

"Oh, my poor Mathilde! How you are changed!"

"Yes, I have had a very hard life, since I last saw you, and great poverty—and that because of you!"

"Of me! How so?"

"Do you remember that diamond necklace you lent me to wear at the ministerial ball?"

"Yes. Well?"

"Well, I lost it."

"What do you mean? You brought it back."

"I brought you back another exactly like it. And it has taken us ten years to pay for it. You can understand that it was not easy for us, for us who had nothing. At last it is ended, and I am very glad."

Madame Forestier had stopped.

"You say that you bought a necklace of diamonds

to replace mine ?”

“Yes. You never noticed it, then ! They were very similar.”

And she smiled with a joy that was at once proud and ingenuous.

Madame Forestier, deeply moved, took her hands.

“Oh, my poor Mathilde ! Why, my necklace was paste ! It was worth at most only five hundred francs ?”

—*Guy de Maupassant.*

### 3. THE VICTORY

She was the Princess Ajita. And the court poet of King Narayan had never seen her. On the day he recited a new poem to the king he would raise his voice just to that pitch which could be heard by unseen hearers in the screened balcony high above the hall. He sent up his song towards the star-land out of his reach, where circled with light, the planet who ruled his destiny shone unknown and out of ken.

He would espy some shadow moving behind the veil. A tinkling sound would come to his ear from afar, and would set him dreaming of the ankles whose tiny golden bells sang at each step. Ah, the rosy red tender feet that walked the dust of the earth like God's mercy on the fallen ! The poet had placed them on the altar of his heart, where he wrote his songs to the tune of those golden bells. Doubt never arose in his mind as to whose shadow it was that moved behind the screen, and whose anklets they were that sang to the time of his beating heart.

Manjari, the maid of the princess, passed by the poet's house on her way to the river, and she never missed a day to have a few words with him on the sly. When she found the road deserted, and the

shadow of dusk on the land, she would boldly enter his room, and sit at the corner of his carpet. There was a suspicion of an added care in the choice of the colour of her veil, in the setting of the flower in her hair.

People smiled and whispered at this, and they were not to blame. For Shekhar the poet never took the trouble to hide the fact that these meetings were a pure joy to him.

The meaning of her name was *the spray of flowers*. One must confess that for an ordinary mortal it was sufficient in its sweetness. But Shekhar made his own addition to this name, and called her the *Spray of Spring Flowers*. And ordinary mortals shook their heads and said, "Ah, me!"

In the spring songs that the poet sang, the praise of the spray of spring flowers was conspicuously reiterated; and the king winked and smiled at him when he heard it, and the poet smiled in answer.

The king would put him the question: "Is it the business of the bee merely to hum in the court of the spring?"

The poet would answer: "No, but also to sip the honey of the spray of spring flowers."

And they all laughed in the king's hall. And it was rumoured that the Princess Ajita also laughed at her maid's accepting the poet's name for her, and Manjari felt glad in her heart.

Thus truth and falsehood mingle in life—and to what God builds man adds his own decoration.

Only those were pure truths which were sung by the poet. The theme was Krishna, the lover god, and Radha, the beloved, the Eternal Man and the Eternal Woman, the sorrow that comes from the beginning of time, and the joy without end. The truth of these songs was tested in his inmost heart by everybody from the beggar to the king himself. The poet's songs were on the lips of all. At the merest glimmer of the moon and the faintest whisper of the summer breeze his songs would break forth in the land from windows and courtyards, from sailing-boats, from shadows of the wayside trees, in numberless voices.

Thus passed the days happily. The poet recited, the king listened, the hearers applauded, Manjari passed and repassed by the poet's room on her way to the river—the shadow flitted behind the screened balcony, and the tiny golden bells tinkled from afar.

Just then set forth from his home in the south a poet on his path of conquest. He came to King Narayan, in the kingdom of Amarapur. He stood before the throne, and uttered a verse in praise of the king. He had challenged all the court poets on his way, and his career of victory had been unbroken.

The king received him with honour, and said:

"Poet, I offer you welcome."

Pundarik, the poet, proudly replied : "Sire, I ask for war."

Shekhar, the court poet of the king, did not know how the battle of the Muse was to be waged. He had no sleep at night. The mighty figure of the famous Pundarik, his sharp nose curved like a scimitar, and his proud head tilted on one side, haunted the poet's vision in the dark.

With a trembling heart Shekhar entered the arena in the morning. The theatre was filled with the crowd.

The poet greeted his rival with a smile and a bow. Pundarik returned it with a slight toss of his head, and turned his face towards his circle of adoring followers with a meaningful smile.

Shekhar cast his glance towards the screened balcony high above and saluted his lady in his mind, saying; "If I am the winner at the combat today, my lady, thy victorious name shall be glorified."

The trumpet sounded. The great crowd stood up, shouting victory to the king. The king, dressed in an ample robe of white, slowly came into the hall like a floating cloud of autumn, and sat on his throne.

Pundarik stood up, and the vast hall became still. With his head raised high and chest expanded, he began in his thundering voice to recite the praise of King Narayan. His words burst upon the walls of

the hall like breakers of the sea, and seemed to rattle against the ribs of the listening crowd. The skill with which he gave varied meanings to the name Narayan, and wove each letter of it through the web of his verses in all manner of combinations, took away the breath of his amazed hearers.

For some minutes after he took his seat his voice continued to vibrate among the numberless pillars of the king's court and in thousands of speechless hearts. The learned professors who had come from distant lands raised their right hands, and cried, "Bravo !"

The king threw a glance on Shekhar's face, and Shekhar in answer raised for a moment his eyes full of pain towards his master, and then stood up like a stricken deer at bay. His face was pale, his bashfulness was almost that of a woman, his slight youthful figure, delicate in its outline, seemed like a tensely strung *vina* ready to break out in music at the least touch.

His head was bent, his voice was low, when he began. The first few verses almost inaudible. Then he slowly raised his head, and his clear sweet voice rose into the sky like a quivering flame of fire. He began with the ancient legend of the kingly line lost in the haze of the past, and brought it down through its long course of heroism and matchless generosity to the present age. He fixed his gaze on the king's

face, and all the vast and unexpressed love of the people for the royal house rose like incense in his song, and enwreathed the throne on all sides. These were his last words when, trembling, he took his seat: "My master, I may be beaten in play of words, but not in my love for thee !"

Tears filled the eyes of the hearers, and the stone walls shook with cries of victory.

Mocking this popular outburst of feeling, with an august shake of his head and a contemptuous sneer, Pundarik stood up, and flung this question to the assembly: "What is there superior to words ?" In a moment the hall lapsed into silence again.

Then with a marvellous display of learning, he proved that the Word was in the beginning, that the Word was God. He piled up questions from scriptures, and built a high altar for the Word to be seated above all that there is in heaven and in earth. He repeated that question in his mighty voice: "What is there superior to words ?"

Proudly he looked around him. None dared to accept his challenge, and he slowly took his seat like a lion who had just made a full meal of its victim. The pandits shouted, "Bravo !" The king remained silent with wonder, and the poet Shekhar felt himself of no account by the side of this stupendous learning. The assembly broke up for that day.

Next day Shekhar began his song. It was of that



day when the pipings of love's flute startled for the first time the hushed air of the Vrinda forest. The shepherded women did not know who was the player or whence came the music. Sometimes it seemed to come from the heart of the south wind, and sometimes from the straying clouds of the hill-tops. It came with a message of tryst from the land of the sunrise, and it floated from the verge of sunset with its sigh of sorrow. The stars seemed to be the stops of the instrument that flooded the dreams of the night with melody. The music seemed to burst all at once from all sides, from fields and groves, from the shady lanes and lonely roads, from the melting blue of the sky, from the shimmering green of the grass. They neither knew its meaning nor could they find words to give utterance to the desire of their hearts. Tears filled their eyes, and their life seemed to long for a death that would be its consummation. Shekhar forgot his audience, forgot the trial of its strength with a rival. He stood alone amid his thoughts that rustled and quivered round him like leaves in a summer breeze, and sang the Song of the Flute. He had in his mind the vision of an image that had taken its shape from a shadow, and the echo of a faint tinkling sound of a distant footstep.

He took his seat. His hearers trembled with the sadness of an indefinable delight, immense and vague, and they forgot to applaud him. As this

feeling died away Pundarik stood up before the throne and challenged his rival to define who was this Lover and who was the Beloved. He arrogantly looked around him, he smiled at his followers and then put the question again : "Who is Krishna, the lover, and who is Radha, the beloved ?"

Then he began to analyse the roots of those names,—and various interpretations of their meanings. He brought before the bewildered audience all the intricacies of the different schools of metaphysics with consummate skill. Each letter of those names he divided from its fellow, and then pursued them with a relentless logic till they fell to the dust in confusion, to be caught up again and restored to a meaning never before imagined by the subtlest of wordmongers.

The pandits were in ecstasy; they applauded vociferously; and the crowd followed them, deluded into the certainty that they had witnessed, that day, the last shred of the curtains of Truth torn to pieces before their eyes by a prodigy of intellect. The performance of his tremendous feat so delighted them that they forgot to ask themselves if there was any truth behind it after all.

The king's mind was overwhelmed with wonder. The atmosphere was completely cleared of all illusion of music, and the vision of the world around seemed to be changed from its freshness of tender green

to the solidity of a high road levelled and made hard with crushed stones.

To the people assembled their own poet appeared a mere boy in comparison with this gaint, who walked with such ease, knocking down difficulties at each step in the world of words and thoughts. It became evident to them for the first time that the poems Shekhar wrote were absurdly simple, and it must be a mere accident that they did not write them themselves. They were neither new, nor difficult, nor instructive, nor necessary.

The king tried to goad his poet with keen glances, silently inciting him to make final effort. But Shekhar took no notice, and remained fixed to his seat.

The king in anger came down from his throne—took off his pearl chain and put it on Pundarik's head. Everybody in the hall cheered. From the upper balcony came a slight sound of the movements of rustling robes and waist-chains hung with golden bells. Shekhar rose from his seat and left the hall.

It was a dark night of waning moon. The poet Shekhar took down his MSS. from his shelves and heaped them on the floor. Some of them contained his earliest writings, which he had almost forgotten. He turned over the pages, reading passages here and there. They all seemed to him poor and trivial—mere words and childish rhymes !

One by one he tore his books to fragments, and threw them into a vessel containing fire, and said : "To thee, to thee, O my beauty, my fire ! Thou hast been burning in my heart all these futile years. If my life were a piece of gold it would come out of its trial brighter, but it is a trodden turf of grass and nothing remains of it but this handful of ashes."

The night wore on. Shekhar opened wide his windows. He spread upon his bed the white flowers that he loved, the jasmines, tuberoses and chrysanthemums, and brought into his bedroom all the lamps he had in his house and lighted them. Then mixing with honey the juice of some poisonous root, he drank it and lay down on his bed.

Golden anklets tinkled in the passage outside the door, and a subtle perfume came into the room with the breeze.

The poet with his eyes shut, said : "My lady, have you taken pity upon your servant at last and come to see him ?"

The answer came in a sweet voice : "My poet I have come."

Shekhar opened his eyes—and saw before his bed the figure of a woman.

His sight was dim and blurred. And it seemed to him that the image made of a shadow that he had ever kept throned in the secret shrine of his heart has come into the outer world in his last moment

to gaze upon his face.

The woman said : "I am the Princess Ajita."

The poet with a great effort sat up on his bed.

The princess whispered into his ear : "The king has not done you justice. It was you who won at the combat, my poet, and I have come to crown you with the crown of victory."

She took the garland of flowers from her own neck, and put it on his hair, and the poet fell down upon his bed stricken by death.

—*Rabindranath Tagore.*

#### 4. AN ASTROLOGER'S DAY

Punctually at midday he opened his bag and spread out his professional equipment, which consisted of a dozen cowrie shells, a square piece of cloth with obscure mystic charts on it, a notebook, and a bundle of palmyra writing. His forehead was resplendent with sacred ash and vermilion, and his eyes sparkled with a sharp abnormal gleam which was really an outcome of a continual searching look for customers, but which his clients took to be a prophetic look and felt comforted. The power of his eyes was considerably enhanced by their position—placed as they were between the painted forehead and the dark whiskers which streamed down his cheeks ; even a half-wit's eyes would sparkle in such a setting. To crown the effect he wound a saffron-coloured turban around his head. This colour scheme never failed. People were attracted to him as bees are attracted to cosmos or dahlia stalks. He sat under the boughs of a spreading tamarind tree which flanked a path running through the Town Hall Park. It was a remarkable place in many ways : a surging crowd was always moving up and down this narrow road morning till night. A variety of trades and occupations was represented all along its way : medicine sellers, sellers of stolen hardware and junk, magicians, and above all, an auctioneer of

cheap cloth, who created enough din all day to attract the whole town. Next to him in vociferousness came a vendor of fried groundnut, who gave his ware a fancy name each day, calling it 'Bombay Ice-Cream' one day, and on the next 'Delhi Almond', and on the third 'Raja's Delicacy', and so on and so forth, and people flocked to him. A considerable portion of this crowd dallied before the astrologer too. The astrologer transacted his business by the light of a flare which crackled and smoked up above the groundnut heap nearby. Half the enchantment of the place was due to the fact that it did not have the benefit of municipal lighting. The place was lit up by shop lights. One or two had hissing gas-lights, some had naked flares stuck on poles, some were lit up by old cycle lamps, and one or two, like the astrologer's, managed without lights of their own. It was a bewildering criss-cross of light rays and moving shadows. This suited the astrologer very well, for the simple reason that he had not in the least intended to be an astrologer when he began life ; and he knew no more of what was going to happen to others than he knew what was going to happen to himself the next minute. He was as much a stranger to the stars as were his innocent customers. Yet he said things which pleased and astonished everyone : that was more a matter of study, practice, and shrewd guesswork. All the same, it was as much

an honest man's labour as any other, and he deserved the wages he carried home at the end of a day.

He had left his village without any previous thought or plan. If he had continued there he would have carried on the work of his forefathers—namely, tilling the land, living, marrying, and ripening in his cornfield and ancestral home. But that was not to be. He had to leave home without telling anyone, and he could not rest till he left it behind a couple of hundred miles. To a villager it is a great deal, as if an ocean flowed between.

He had a working analysis of mankind's troubles: marriage, money and the tangles of human ties. Long practice had sharpened his perception. Within five minutes he understood what was wrong. He charged three pies per question, never opened his mouth till the other had spoken for at least ten minutes, which provided him enough stuff for a dozen answers and advices. When he told the person before him, gazing at his palm, 'In many ways you are not getting the fullest results for your efforts,' nine out of ten were disposed to agree with him. Or he questioned: 'Is there any woman in your family, may be even a distant relative who is not well disposed towards you?' Or he gave an analysis of character: 'Most of your troubles are due to your nature. How can you be otherwise with Saturn where he is? You have an impetuous



nature and a rough exterior.' This endeared him to their hearts immediately, for even the mildest of us loves to think that he has a forbidding exterior.

The nuts vendor blew out his fire and rose to go home. This was a signal for the astrologer to bundle up too, since it left him in darkness except for a little shaft of green light which strayed in from somewhere and touched the ground before him. He picked up his cowrie shells and paraphernalia and was putting them back into his bag when the green shaft of light was blotted out; he looked up and saw a man standing before him. He sensed a possible client and said : 'You look so careworn. It will do you good to sit down for a while and chat with me.' The other grumbled some reply vaguely. The astrologer pressed his invitation ; whereupon the other thrust his palm under his nose, saying : 'You call yourself an astrologer ?' The astrologer felt challenged and said, tilting the other's palm towards the green shaft of light : 'Yours is a nature.....' 'Oh, stop that,' the other said. 'Tell me something worth while.....'

Our friend felt piqued. 'I charge only three pies per question, and what you get ought to be good enough for your money....' At this the other withdrew his arm, took out an anna, and flung it to him, saying : 'I have questions to ask. If I prove that you are bluffing, you must return that

anna to me with interest.'

'If you find my answers satisfactory, will you give me five rupees ?'

'No.'

'Or will you give me eight annas ?'

'All right, provided you give me twice as much if you are wrong,' said the stranger. This pact was accepted after a little further argument. The astrologer sent up a prayer to heaven as the other lit a cheroot. The astrologer caught a glimpse of his face by the matchlight. There was a pause as cars hooted on the road, jutka drivers swore at their horses, and the babble of the crowd agitated the semi-darkness of the park. The other sat down, sucking his cheroot, puffing out, sat there ruthlessly. The astrologer felt very uncomfortable. 'Here, take your anna back. I am not used to such challenges. It is late for me today....' He made preparations to bundle up. The other held his wrist and said : 'You can't get out of it now. You dragged me in while I was passing.' The astrologer shivered in his grip ; and his voice shook and became faint. 'Leave me today. I will speak to you tomorrow.' The other thrust his palm in his face and said : 'Challenge is challenge. Go on.' The astrologer proceeded with his throat drying up : 'There is a woman...'

'Stop,' said the other. 'I don't want all that. Shall I succeed in my present search or not ? Answer

this and go. Otherwise I will not let you go till you disgorge all your coins.' The astrologer muttered a few incantations and replied : 'All right. I will speak. But will you give me a rupee if what I say is convincing ? Otherwise I will not open my mouth, and you may do what you like.' After a good deal of haggling the other agreed. The astrologer said : 'You were left for dead. Am I right ?'

'Ah, tell me more.'

'A knife has passed through you once ?' said the astrologer.

'Good fellow !' He bared his chest to show the scar. 'What else ?'

'And then you were pushed into a well nearby in the field. You were left for dead.'

'I should have been dead if some passer-by had not chanced to peep into the well', exclaimed the other over-whelmed by enthusiasm. 'When shall I get at him ?' he asked, clenching his fist.

'In the next world,' answered the astrologer, 'He died four months ago in a far-off town. You will never see any more of him.' The other groaned on hearing it. The astrologer proceeded :

"Guru Nayak—"

'You know my name !' the other said, taken aback.

'As I know all other things, Guru Nayak, listen carefully to what I have to say. Your village is two

days' journey due north of this town. Take the next train and be gone. I see once again great danger to your life if you go from home.' He took out a pinch of sacred ash and held it to him. 'Rub it on your forehead and go home. Never travel southward again and you will live to be a hundred.'

'Why should I leave home again ?' the other said reflectively. 'I was only going away now and then to look for him and to choke out his life if I met him.' He shook his head regretfully. 'He has escaped my hands. I hope at least he died as he deserved.' 'Yes,' said the astrologer. 'He was crushed under a lorry.' The other looked gratified to hear it.

The place was deserted by the time the astrologer picked up his articles and put them into his bag. The green shaft was also gone, leaving the place in darkness and silence. The stranger had gone off into the night, after giving the astrologer a handful of coins.

It was nearly mid-night when the astrologer reached home. His wife was waiting for him at the door and demanded an explanation. He flung the coins at her and said : 'Count them. One man gave all that.'

'Twelve and a half annas,' she said, counting. She was overjoyed. 'I can buy some jaggery and coconut tomorrow. The child has been asking for

sweets for so many days now. I will prepare some nice stuff for her."

"The swine has cheated me ! He promised me a rupee," said the astrologer. She looked up at him. "You look worried. What is wrong ?"

"Nothing."

After dinner, sitting on the *pyol*, he told her : "Do you know a great load is gone from me today ? I thought I had the blood of a man on my hands all these years. That was the reason why I ran away from home, settled here, and married you. He is alive."

She gasped. "You tried to kill !"

"Yes, in our village, when I was a silly youngster. We drank, gambled, and quarrelled badly one day—why think of it now ? Time to sleep," he said, yawning, and stretched himself on the *pyol*.

—R. K. Narayan.

## 5. GOD LIVES IN THE PANCH

Jumman Sheikh and Alagu Chowdhari were fast friends. Besides tilling their fields in common, they carried on a joint money-lending business. So strong indeed was their mutual faith in each other that when either of them was absent the other looked after his household. This happened when Jumman went on the Haj and Alagu had to go abroad on business. What was the secret of this mutual trust and confidence ? Social or religious affinity ? No, but a common outlook and a community of ideas. And what better foundation could there be for a lasting friendship ?

The friendship was not the outcome of any sudden impulse. It dated from the days of their childhood, when Alagu sat for his lessons at the feet of Jumman's father, who had his own notions how to bring up a lad. 'Don't spare the rod, or you'll spoil him,' is what he used to say. He practised this precept in the case of his own son Jumman, with the result that there was none in the village to equal him either in drafting a petition or drawing up a deed. In course of time Jumman was highly esteemed in the village and the neighbourhood for his scholarship and attainments. Alagu's father held different views.

He believed that your teacher's blessing would transform you into a fine scholar, and there could be no surer way to his good grace than to keep his *hookah* fresh and feed his *chillum* regularly. Poor Alagu was never found wanting in this service. And if in the end he failed to acquire much learning, the fault was not his but that of the stars. So argued his old father.

That does not mean that Alagu was without influence in the village. On the other hand, if Jumman was esteemed for his learning, Alagu was respected for his wealth.

Now Jumman had an old relation a maternal aunt, who had some property. This she transferred to him by a deed on the understanding that she would be well looked after. So long as the deed remained unregistered none was so obliging to the old lady as her nephew, none so considerate to her. Her every wish was anticipated and cheerfully carried out. But everything changed the moment the deed was registered. Jumman, who used to wait dotingly on his old aunt, now became supremely indifferent. His wife, Kariman, went even further. She grudged even the little food that the old lady ate. No meal was now served to her without Kariman letting loose a barb or two dipped in gall or poison. The very bread that the aunt ate seemed to be seasoned with the meat of abuse. And this

went on mounting. Kariman would say : 'How long is the old hag going to live ?' 'By giving us a few acres of waste land, she thinks she has bought us.' 'She is a great lady who can't swallow a morsel without her *dal* being seasoned with *ghee* !' 'We could have purchased a whole village with the money spent on her feeding.'

Patience has its limits. One day, unable to bear this constant nagging and insult from his wife, the aunt spoke to Jumman. Jumman flatly refused to interfere in household affairs. He told her in effect that his wife knew best how to run the house. Crest-fallen, the old lady tried to bear as well she could her daily humiliation. But at length even her patience gave way. She called Jumman and said to him : 'My son, it is clear there is no room for me in your house. You had better give me a small allowance so that I can set up a separate kitchen.'

'Does money grow on trees ?' replied Jumman tartly.

'Of course not. But how am I to live ?' pleaded the aunt.

'Who said that you had conquered death ?' taunted Jumman gravely.

This exasperated the aunt. She threatened to take her case before the panchayat. Nothing could please Jumman better. He knew that the panchayat could give one decision and one only. Was there



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anyone in the village whom he had not obliged ? Was there one who dared to incur his displeasure ? Surely, the members of the panchayat would be his friends and not angels from heaven. So, when the old lady threatened to take her case to the panchayat, Jumman laughed within himself as a hunter laughs when he sees his quarry walk unwarily into the very trap he has set for it.

For days after the incident the old woman could be seen, leaning on her poor staff, going about from villager to villager to enlist their sympathy. With her body doubled up with age, weak and infirm, dragging her unwilling feet, she persisted in her mission. There was no one into whose ear she did not pour her pitiable tale. But not many were moved. Most of them could offer her only verbal sympathy, which they never meant; others cursed the hard times which had brought her to such a pass. Some even advised her to make it up with her nephew. 'What more did she need,' they said, 'than a few morsels and to pass her days in prayer ?' Nor did the village lack men to whom the sight of the aged woman with her white hair and toothless mouth, and body bent as a bow, was a source of constant fun. The number of those who felt genuine pity for her was small indeed.

At last after she had been to everybody else, the aunt came to Alagu. Panting from the exertion of

the journey, she rested a little, and then explained the object of her mission.

'I have come to you, my son,' she said, 'to ask you to attend the panchayat when the matter comes up.'

'But is there any need for me to do this ?' replied Alagu. 'Surely, there will be many who will attend it.'

'Yes, I have been to every one of them,' rejoined the aunt. 'It is for them to do so or not.'

'Since you insist, I will come,' said Alagu ; 'but you will have to excuse me if I don't take any part in the proceedings.'

'Why so, my son ?'

'Because, as you know, Jumman is my old friend. I can ill afford to go against him.'

'But is it right, my son, that for his sake you should keep your mouth shut and not say what you feel, what you consider just ?'

When our conscience is asleep we may not be conscious of the wrong we do unwittingly, but challenge your conscience, wake it up, and you will find that it puts up with nothing that is unfair. So it happened with Alagu. He did not reply, but the words of the old lady kept ringing in his ears.

The panchayat was scheduled to be held in the evening under the village tree. Jumman saw to all the arrangements. A carpet was spread, and a good

supply of *pan*, *elaichi* and *hookahs* was provided. As the guests began to arrive one by one, they were welcomed by Jumman, who had taken his seat with Alagu in a far corner. As the sun set, the proceedings of the panchayat started. Overhead on the tree another panchayat was going on : the birds were holding their evening meeting.

As one looked round, one could see that a majority of those who had come to the panchayat were those who were not well disposed towards Jumman.

The scene presented a strange sight. Live charcoal was kept glowing in one corner to feed the *chillums*, and this was in constant demand by the guests. The village barber, who attended to this business, had hardly a moment's rest. In another corner the village children were shouting, crying, and quarrelling ; and in yet another the village dogs, thinking it was a feast day, had assembled in full force. In short, there was excitement and hubbub all round.

When all the panches had taken their seats, the aged aunt rose, and thus addressed them :

'You know, members of the panchayat, that three years ago I executed a deed in favour of my nephew Jumman, transferring all my property' to him. Jumman on his part promised to maintain me. For a long time I have been subjected to abuse, insults

and nagging from his wife without any help from Jumman. Things have now come to such a pass that it is no longer possible for me to live with him. I am denied food and clothes. I am a helpless widow, too poor to run to the courts for redress. All I can do is to appeal to you for justice. Please advise me what to do. Punish me if I am in the wrong, but if you find fault with Jumman correct him. I solemnly assure you that I shall faithfully carry out your orders.'

Ramadhan Misra, some of whose tenants Jumman had settled in his own village, and who consequently nursed a grievance against him, now rose and asked Jumman to suggest his nominee to act as head-panch, each party to the dispute having the right to do so.

Jumman did not fail to understand the significance of this remark. He knew that a majority of those who had turned up were against him for one reason or another. He therefore replied :

'The voice of the panch is the voice of God. Let my aunt herself nominate the head-panch. I shall abide by her decision.'

And when the old woman shouted, "Why, man of God, why don't you suggest your nominee ?" Jumman sharply retorted :

'I know it is your hour of triumph. Choose your own nominee. It's all the same to me.'

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The insinuation was not lost on the aunt. She rebuked him :

‘My son, fear God. The panch knows neither friend nor enemy. If you don’t trust anyone, don’t propose any name. But what do you say to Alagu Chowdhari ?’

Jumman was not prepared for this good luck. Hiding his secret joy, he replied :

‘Very well. If you must have him, have him. It is all the same to me whether you nominate Alagu Chowdhari or Ramdhan Misra.’

Alagu, who did not wish to be dragged into the dispute, now demurred, and said :

‘Aunt, you are not unaware of my relations with Jumman.’

‘I know them well, my son,’ she replied, ‘but I also know that you will not kill your conscience for the sake of friendship. Allah lives in the heart of the panch, and his voice is the voice of God.’

That is how Alagu Chowdhari became the head-panch. Ramadhan Misra and others who were opposed to Jumman cursed the old woman for her folly in their heart of hearts.

Alagu now began. Addressing Jumman he said :

‘Sheikh Jumman, you and I are old friends. Whenever any of us was in trouble, the other came to his help. Now I am a panch. You and your aunt are equal in my eyes. If you have anything to say



in your defence, say it.'

Jumman, believing that Alagu was only pretending to be fair and just, replied confidently.

'Members of the panchayat know that three years ago my aunt executed a deed in my favour, transferring all her property to me. In return I promised to maintain her as long as she lived. God is my witness that I have kept my word. I have obeyed her as I would have obeyed my mother. It is my duty to serve her, but I cannot disguise the fact that there have been occasional quarrels between her and my wife. Women are always like that. It is no fault of mine. My aunt now claims a monthly maintenance allowance from me. That is beyond me as her property does not yield much. Besides, there is no mention of it in the deed. Had there been, I would have washed my hands clean of it. This is all that I have to say in the matter.'

Alagu Chowdhari was no novice. His business took him often to the courts. He knew law as well as any lawyer. He made mincemeat of Jumman in his cross-examination. Each question that he thundered out fell like the blow of a hammer. Ramadhan was in exultation; while Jumman was wondering. 'What devil is there in this friend of mine ! Only a moment ago he was talking to me so cordially. Now he seems to be bent upon digging my grave. God knows what ancient grudge he is feeding fat today.'



While Jumman was still lost in those thoughts, Alagu pronounced the verdict :

'Jumman Sheikh ! The members of the panchayat have gone into the matter most carefully. It is their considered opinion that you are liable to pay to your aunt a fixed monthly allowance out of the realization from her property. If you do not comply with this decision, the deed transferring her property to you will be deemed void.'

Jumman was stunned. The words fell on his ears like a thunderbolt. He could not understand. The friend on whom he relied so much had suddenly turned into a bitter foe ! It was only in crucial moments like this that friendship was tested ! *Kaliyuga* had indeed come, for deceit and treachery were synonymous with friendship. No wonder that plague and cholera were ravaging the country !

It was different with Ramadhan Misra and other members of the panchayat. No praise was now too high for Alagu and his sense of fairness and justice. 'This is the true panchayat.' 'Alagu has divided truth from falsehood as a swan separates milk from water.' Friendship has its place in life, but it cannot override truth and justice.' 'It is only honest men like Alagu who sustain the earth, or it would have sunk under the ocean long ago.' These were some of the remarks they were making.

As a result of the panchayat verdict, the strong

roots of the tree of friendship which Jumman and Alagu had planted together were now sorely shaken. The two were seldom seen together. A single blast of truth had loosened their friendship. It fell like a tree whose roots, instead of going deep into the solid earth, were loosely held in sand.

The two friends now became over-formal in exchanging courtesies. They avoided meeting each other, and if they ever met by chance, it was like a sword meeting the shield. Day and night there was only one rankling thought in Jumman's heart, how to avenge himself on Alagu for his dark treachery.

It is always easier to harm a person than to do him a good turn. If you are constantly on the lookout for an opportunity to wrong someone, you are sure to find it sooner or later. Jumman had not long to wait.

Alagu had purchased a year ago from the Bateshwar fair a pair of fine bullocks. With their beautiful long curved horns and Western breed, they were for months the envy and the rage of the whole village. But as ill luck would have it, one of the bullocks died. As this happened soon after the panchayat, the relations between the two friends became further strained. Jumman started saying, 'God's punishment has overtaken Alagu for his treacherous conduct.' Alagu on his side began to

connect the bullock's sudden death with Jumman. He suspected that Jumman had poisoned it. His wife openly went about accusing Jumman of the crime. The two viragos now came out and hurled abuses and insults at each other. It was only with great difficulty that their husbands succeeded in parting them. Jumman dragged his wife away from the scene of battle, and Alagu had to wield his stick to quiet the other woman.

With one bullock dead, Alagu had now no use for the other. For long he tried hard to secure another bullock to make up his pair, but without success. He therefore decided to sell it.

There lived in the village one Samjhu Sahu, a cart-driver, who carried on his business between the village and the town. He used to take the village commodities to the town, and with the proceeds of their sale he brought back to the village such goods as found a ready market there. He thought to himself that if he could get Alagu's bullock he would be able to make at least three or four trips daily to the town and back, and thus swell his profits. At present all he could do was to make one or two trips to the town market. With this purpose he negotiated for the purchase of Alagu's bullock; and ultimately, after trial, purchased it on the understanding that he would pay the price in a month's time.

Hoping to multiply his income several times and

finding the bullock strong and hefty, Samjhu Sahu began to overwork it. Three trips to the town were now his daily routine, and sometimes even four. The bullock was hardly allowed to rest or to take its full feed. It had hardly finished one trip when it was yoked for another. How different from its life at Alagu's ! There it was used only occasionally. A servant looked after it constantly, and its body was rubbed hard twice a day. No wonder it grew fat and strong, and always looked fresh. But now, instead of rest and good care, it was one unceasing round of trips to and from the town. And on top of it came starvation. In a month the poor bullock was reduced to a skeleton. It could hardly drag the cart. When it failed to do so, or it slowed down, a shower of blows invariably descended on its aching limbs.

One day, when the bullock was already dead tired from three trips, Sahu loaded the cart with twice the normal weight for its fourth trip of the day. Jaded and tired out, the poor animal strained its utmost to move the cart but failed. It tried again. This time it succeeded, but could not proceed more than a few yards. Sahu as usual began to rain down his blows, till on account of the severe punishment it received and the tired limbs that were overstrained, the bullock tottered and collapsed. But still Sahu would not stop. He went on belabouring the

poor animal till death came as a welcome release.

Sahu did not know what to do. He looked round for help, but none was forthcoming. Then he slowly disengaged the dead animal from the cart and decided to spend the night there, but not before he had given a last kick to the poor animal and cursed it for landing him in such difficulties. For the truth is that it was not the loss of the bullock which troubled Sahu so much as the dread fact that the cart carried a large quantity of *ghee*, *gur* and salt, which in terms of money meant much ; and in addition he had on his person about two hundred and fifty rupees which he had realized from the day's sale of village goods. Sahu could not leave the cart with its rich load, nor did he dare to trudge the distance home alone and unfriended with so much cash about him. He therefore thought it best to remain where he was, passing the long weary night awake with the help of his *chillum*. Tying his purse round his waist like a belt, he busied himself with his *chillum* and charcoal till midnight came. Then, wearied with the day's work and his misfortune, his eyes began to droop, and he was soon fast asleep.

Not till daybreak did he awake. Then, casually passing his hand round his waist to see that all was safe, he discovered to his horror that all the money was gone. He ran to his cart only to find that the tins of *ghee*, which he had carefully

stored there, were also gone. Overwhelmed with grief he flung himself on the ground, beat his head, and wept. When he had recovered a little from the shock he stood up, and managed somehow to trudge home. Long did the Sahuain beat her breast and bitterly did she cry when she heard the doleful story. She cursed and abused Alagu as the root cause of all their misfortunes. If he had not sold in an evil hour the ill-starred bullock, surely they would never have had to see that day ! They had lost all their life's savings.

One day several months after the bullock's death Alagu thought to remind Sahu about the bullock's price. This was enough to make Sahu and his wife fly at him like mad dogs. 'Look at the fellow's brazenness !' they cried. 'He has the cheek to come to us and demand the bullock's price after all the misfortune which the animal has brought on us !' 'He sold us a dead beast, and now he wants us to pay for it !' 'We are true Banias, who know what is what. First go and wash your dirty face in ditch-water, and then come to us for payment.' 'After all, we did not use your bullock for more than a month, and if you must insist on your claims, better take away our bullock. Use it for two months, if you please, and then return it to us. This is the utmost that we can do,' shouted husband and wife.

Alagu Chowdhari was not without his enemies

in the village. The news that Sahu had refused to honour his promise soon spread. All those whom Alagu had displeased now gathered round Sahu and supported his contention. But one hundred and fifty rupees—the price of the bullock—was not a small sum and Alagu could ill-afford to forego it. Though rebuffed and abused again and again by Sahu whenever he approached him, he did not give up his claim.

One day, when Sahu's tongue was unusually sharp, Alagu too lost his temper. Sahu rushed to his cottage to fetch his lathi, when his wife took the field. Before Sahu could return, Sahuain, secure in her womanhood, flew at Alagu, who, however, hit back with such zeal that she found that safety lay in a hasty retreat to her house. She ran as fast as her legs could carry her and bolted the doors of her room from inside. Meanwhile a large crowd had gathered and tried to pacify the combatants. On its advice both Sahu and Alagu agreed to refer the matter to the panchayat for decision.

For a second time preparations for holding the panchayat were set afoot. Both parties started vigorous canvassing in their support. At length, on the third day after the quarrel, the panchayat met. The setting was the same as for the first panchayat. The panches sat under the same old tree. The evening was no different, and the birds again assem-



bled on the branches to debate issues affecting their welfare. The crows were discussing their right to the green peas in the field ; and the parrots whether men were justified in charging them with inconstancy when they themselves were faithless to their friends.

When the full panchayat had assembled, Ramadhan Misra proposed that nominations should be invited for the head-panch. Turning to Alagu, he inquired if he had any particular man in view. Alagu replied meekly, 'No, let Sahu propose.' Thereupon Sahu, glad to have his own man, shouted, 'I nominate Sheikh Jumman.'

At the sound of Jumman's name Alagu's heart began to sink. His face turned pale and it looked as if he had received a sudden blow. But what could he do ? He had himself asked Sahu to make his own nomination. Ramadhan Misra, his friend ; sensed what was passing in Alagu's mind, and in order to help him out he slyly prompted : 'Have you, Alagu, any objection to Sahu's nomination ?' But Alagu did not take the hint. In a low and despondent voice he replied, 'None whatever.'

So Jumman became the head-panch.

We become conscious of our weaknesses the moment we are placed in some responsible position. We then try to prove equal to the task. If we are ever tempted to go astray, it is this thought which prevents us from doing so. Does the editor ever care to weigh



his words when he launches his fiery denunciations, day in and day out, against the Government ? But let him have a seat in the Cabinet. Now none is so thoughtful, so wise, so far-sighted as he. Or, take the case of a young man. How reckless and irresponsible he is ! What sleepless nights does he not give his parents by his conduct ? But let him marry and have children. The same wild youth is now transformed into a sober and grave householder.

So it happened with Sheikh Jumman. The moment he became head-panch he suddenly became conscious of the gravity of his office. Seated in that high place, he knew he had to hold the balance even, to sift right from wrong, to utter nothing which might even remotely be construed as unfair. He must not allow his personal feelings to swerve him one hair's breadth from the path of truth.

Alagu and Sahu now stated their respective cases. After hearing the parties the panches came to the unanimous decision that Sahu should compensate Alagu. The only issue on which they differed was whether Alagu was entitled to the full price of the bullock, or whether, taking into consideration the loss suffered by Sahu, there should be any reduction in the price. Two were for the former and two for the latter view. The point was also pressed that Sahu had been guilty of treating the bullock cruelly, and so causing its death. He should, therefore, not merely

pay its price to Alagu, but in addition should be fined, so that in future no one would dare to ill-treat the cattle. After the issues had been discussed long and carefully, Jumman delivered the judgement. Addressing the parties he said :

'Alagu Chowdhari and Samjhu Sahu ! The panches have heard you, and considered the issues carefully. It is their decision that Alagu is entitled to the full price of the bullock, for at the time when he sold it, it suffered from no disease or disability. If Samjhu had then paid the price, the issue now before the panchayat would never have arisen at all. The death of the bullock was caused by overwork and want of proper care. Alagu is in no wise to blame.'

Though satisfied that the decision was in favour of his friend Ramadhan Misra still urged that an example should be made of Samjhu for killing the bullock, and that he should be fined. Jumman countered by retorting that this was altogether a separate issue, and was not before the panchayat. When Samjhu pleaded for some consideration in view of his plight, Jumman answered it was entirely for Alagu to decide whether or not to reduce the price.

Alagu could now no longer contain his feelings. He stood up and shouted over and over again, 'Victory to the panchayat !' The crowd took up the cry, and soon the whole village echoed with 'Victory to the panchayat !'

Everyone was now loud in praise of Jumman. Some said, 'This is what justice means.' Others, 'This is surely not man's doing. God lives in the heart of the panches, and directs their thoughts. How then could the panches ever be deceived ?'

Soon afterwards Jumman came upto Alagu and, embracing him said :

'Since the last panchayat I had been your sworn enemy. Today I realised what it was to be a panch ; that he has no private feelings of his own ; that he knows neither friend nor foe. All that matters to him is to administer justice. I am convinced now that the panch speaks with the voice of God.'

This was too much for Alagu. He broke down and wept on Jumman's shoulders. The tears which he shed that day washed away all the dirt and dust of misunderstanding between the two friends, and thus the withered and faded creeper of their friendship once again became fresh and green.

—*Munshi Prem Chand.*

## 6. THE MONKEY'S PAW

### I

Without, the night was cold and wet, but in the small parlour of Lakesnam Villa the blinds were drawn and the fire burned brightly. Father and son were at chess, the former, who possessed ideas about the game involving radical changes, putting his king into such sharp and unnecessary perils that it even provoked comment from the white-haired old lady knitting placidly by the fire.

"Hark at the wind," said Mr. White, who having seen a fatal mistake after it was too late, was amiably desirous of preventing his son from seeing it.

"I'm listening," said the latter, grimly surveying the board as he stretched out his hand. "Check."

"I should hardly think that he'd come tonight," said his father, with his hand poised over the board.

"Mate," replied the son.

"That's the worst of living so far out," bawled Mr. White, with sudden and unlooked-for violence : "of all the beastly, slushy, out-of-the-way places to live in, this is the worst. Pathway's a bog, and the

road's a torrent. I don't know what people are thinking about. I suppose because only two houses on the road are let, they think it doesn't matter."

"Never mind, dear," said his wife soothingly; "perhaps you'll win the next one."

Mr. White looked up sharply, just in time to intercept a knowing glance between mother and son. The words died away on his lips, and he hid a guilty grin in his thin gray beard.

"There he is," said Herbert White, as the gate banged loudly and heavy footsteps came towards the door.

The old man rose with hospitable haste, and opening the door, was heard condoling with the new arrival. The new arrival also consoled with himself, so that Mrs. White said, "Tut, tut;" and coughed gently as her husband entered the room, followed by a tall burly man, beady of eye and rubicund of visage.

"Sergeant-Major Morris," he said, introducing him.

The sergeant-major shook hands, and taking the proffered seat by the fire, watched contentedly while his host got out whisky and tumblers and stood a small copper kettle on the fire.

At the third glass his eyes got brighter, and he began to talk, the little family circle regarding with eager interest this visitor from distant parts,

as he squared his broad shoulders in the chair and spoke of strange scenes and doughty deeds, of wars and plagues and strange peoples.

"Twenty-one years of it," said Mr. White, nodding at his wife and son. "When he went away he was a slip of a youth in the warehouse. Now look at him."

"He don't look to have taken much harm." said Mrs. White politely.

"I'd like to go to India myself," said the old man, "just to look round a bit, you know."

"Better where you are," said the sergeant-major shaking his head. He put down the empty glass and, sighing softly, shook it again.

"I should like to see those old temples and fakirs and jugglers," said the old man. "What was that you started telling me the other day about monkey's paw or something, Morris?"

"Nothing," said the soldier hastily, "Least-ways, nothing worth hearing."

"Monkey's Paw?" said Mrs. White curiously.

"Well, it's just a bit of what you might call magic, perhaps," said the sergeant-major off-handedly.

His three listeners leaned forward eagerly. The visitor absent-mindedly put his empty glass to his lips and then set it down again. His host filled it for him.

"To look at," said the sergeant-major, fumbling in his pocket, "it's just an ordinary little paw, dried to a mummy."

He took something out of his pocket and proffered it. Mrs. White drew back with a grimace, but her son, taking it, examined it curiously.

"And what is there special about it ?" inquired Mr. White as he took it from his son and, having examined it, placed it upon the table.

"It had a spell put on it by an old fakir," said the sergeant-major, "a very holy man. He wanted to show that fate ruled people's lives, and that those who interfered with it did so to their sorrow. He put a spell on it so that three separate men could each have three wishes from it."

His manner was so impressive that his hearers were conscious that their light laughter jarred somewhat.

"Well, why don't you have three, sir ?" said Herbert White cleverly.

The soldier regarded him in the way that middle age is wont to regard presumptuous youth. "I have," he said quietly, and his blotchy face whitened.

"And did you really have the three wishes granted ?" asked Mrs. White.

"I did," said the sergeant-major, and his glass tapped against his strong teeth.

"And has anybody else wished ?" inquired the old lady. "O' yes", replied the Sergeant-major, "I don't know what the first two were, but his third wish was for death. That's how I got the paw."

His tones were so grave that a hush fell upon the group.

"If you've had your three wishes, it's no good to you now, then, Morris," said the old man at last. "What do you keep it for ?"

The soldier shook his head. "Fancy, I suppose," he said slowly. "I did have some idea of selling it, but I don't think I will. It has caused enough mischief already. Besides, people won't buy. They think it's a fairy tale, some of them, and those who do think anything of it want to try it first and pay me afterwards."

"If you could have another three wishes," said the old man, eyeing him keenly, "would you have them ?"

"I don't know," said the other. "I don't know."

He took the paw, and dangling it between his front finger and thumb, suddenly threw it upon the fire. White, with a slight cry, stooped down and snatched it off.

"Better let it burn," said the soldier solemnly.

"If you don't want it, Morris," said the old man, "give it to me."



"I won't," said his friend doggedly. "I threw it on the fire. If you keep it, don't blame me for what happens. Pitch it on the fire again, like a sensible man."

The other shook his head and examined his new possession closely. "How do you do it?" he inquired.

"Hold it up in your right hand and wish aloud," said the sergeant-major, "but I warn you of the consequences."

"Sounds like the Arabian Nights," said Mrs. White, as she rose and began to set the supper, "Don't you think you might wish for four pairs of hands for me?"

Her husband drew the talisman from his pocket and then all three burst into laughter as the sergeant-major, with a look of alarm on his face, caught him by the arm. "If you must wish," he said gruffly, "wish for something sensible."

Mr. White dropped it back into his pocket, and placing chairs motioned his friend to the table. In the business of supper the talisman was partly forgotten, and afterward the three sat listening in an enthralled fashion to a second instalment of the soldier's adventures in India.

"If the tale about the monkey's paw is not more truthful than those he has been telling us," said Herbert, as the door closed behind their guest, just in time for him to catch the last train "we shan't

make much out of it."

"Did you give him anything for it, father?" inquired Mrs. White, regarding her husband closely.

"A trifle," said he, coloring slightly. "He didn't want it, but I made him take it. And he pressed me again to throw it away."

"Likely," said Herbert, with pretended horror. "Why, we're going to be rich, and famous, and happy. Wish to be an emperor, father, to begin with, then you can't be henpecked."

He darted round the table, pursued by the maligned Mrs. White armed with an antimacassar.

Mr. White took the paw from his pocket and eyed it dubiously. "I don't know what to wish for and that's a fact," he said slowly. "It seems to me I've got all I want."

"If you only cleared the house, you'd be quite happy, wouldn't you?" said Herbert, with his hand on his shoulder. "Well, wish for two hundred pounds, then; that'll just do it."

His father, smiling shamefacedly at his own credulity, held up the talisman, as his son, with a solemn face somewhat marred by a wink at his mother, sat down at the piano and struck a few impressive chords.

"I wish for two hundred pounds," said the old man distinctly.

A fine crash from the piano greeted the words, interrupted by a shuddering cry from the old man. His wife and son ran towards him.

"It moved," he cried, with a glance of disgust at the object as it lay on the floor. "As I wished, it twisted in my hands like a snake."

"Well, I don't see the money," said his son, as he picked it up and placed it on the table, "and I bet I never shall."

"It must have been your fancy, father," said his wife, regarding him anxiously.

He shook his head. "Never mind, though ; there's no harm done, but it gave me a shock all the same."

They sat down by the fire again while the two men finished their pipes. Outside, the wind was higher than ever, and the old man started nervously at the sound of a door banging upstairs. A silence, unusual and depressing, settled upon all three, which lasted until the old couple rose to retire for the night.

"I expect you'll find the cash tied up in a big bag in the middle of your bed," said Herbert as he bade them good night, "and something horrible squatting up on top of the wardrobe watching you as you pocket your ill-gotten gains."

## II

In the brightness of the wintry sun next morning as it streamed over the breakfast table Mr. White laughed at his fears. There was an air of prosaic wholesomeness about the room which it had lacked on the previous night, and the dirty, shrivelled little paw was pitched on the sideboard with a carelessness which betokened no great belief in its virtues.

"I suppose all old soldiers are the same," said Mrs. White. "The idea of our listening to such nonsense ! How could wishes be granted in these days ? And if they could, how could two hundred pounds hurt you, father ?"

"Might drop on my head from the sky," said Mr. White and added, "Morris said the things happened so naturally that you might, if you so wished, attribute it to coincidence."

"Well—it hasn't happened," said Mrs. White, "and I am sure, it isn't going to happen."

She was very happy at the expense of her husband's credulity. All of which did not prevent her from scurrying to the door at the postman's knock, nor prevent her from referring somewhat shortly to retired sergeant-majors of bibulous habits when she found that the post brought a tailor's bill.

"Herbert will have some more of his funny remarks, I expect, when he comes home," she said, as they sat at dinner.

"I dare say," said Mr. White, pouring himself out some beer ; "but for all that the thing moved in my hand ; that I'll swear to."

"You thought it did," said the old lady soothingly.

"I say it did," replied the other. "There was no thought about it. I had just—what's the matter ?"

His wife made no reply. She was watching the mysterious movements of a man outside, who peering in an undecided fashion at the house, appeared to be trying to make up his mind to enter. In mental connection with the two hundred pounds she noticed that the stranger was well dressed and wore a silk hat of glossy newness. Three times he paused at the gate and then walked on again. The fourth time he stood with his hand upon it, and then with sudden resolution flung it open and walked up the path. Mrs. White at the same moment placed her hand behind her, and hurriedly unfastening the strings of her apron, put that useful article of apparel beneath the cushion of her chair.

She brought the stranger, who seemed ill at ease, into the room. He gazed furtively at Mrs. White and listened in a preoccupied fashion as the old lady apologized for the appearance of the room ; and her husband's coat, a garment which he usually reserved for the garden. She then waited as patiently as her sex would permit for him to broach his business, but

he was at first strangely silent.

"I—was asked to call," he said at last, and stooped and picked a piece of cotton from his trousers. "I come from Maw and Meggins."

The old lady started. "Is anything the matter ?" she asked breathlessly. "Has anything happened to Herbert ? What is it ? What is it ?"

Her husband interposed. "There, there, mother," he said hastily. "Sit down, and don't jump to conclusions. You've not brought bad news, I'm sure, sir," and he eyed the other wistfully.

"I'm sorry—" began the visitor.

"Is he hurt ?" demanded the mother.

The visitor bowed in assent. "Badly hurt," he said quietly, "but he is not in any pain."

"Oh, thank God !" said the old woman, clasping her hands. "Thank God for that ! Thank—"

She broke off suddenly as the sinister meaning of the assurance dawned upon her and she saw the awful confirmation of her fears in the other's averted face. She caught her breath, and turning to her slower-witted husband, laid her trembling old hand upon his. There was a long silence.

"He was caught in the machinery," said the visitor at length, in a low voice.

"Caught in the machinery," repeated Mr. White, in a dazed fashion, "yes."

He sat staring blankly out at the window, and

taking his wife's hand between his own, pressed it as he had been wont to do in their old courting-days nearly forty years before.

"He was the only one left to us," he said, turning gently to the visitor, "It is hard."

The other coughed, and rising, walked slowly to the window. "The firm wished me to convey their sincere sympathy with you in your great loss," he said, without looking around. "I beg that you will understand that I am only their servant and merely obeying orders."

There was no reply ; the old woman's face was white, her eyes staring, and her breath inaudible ; on the husband's face was a look such as his friend the sergeant might have carried into his first action.

"I was to say that Maw and Meggins disclaim all responsibility," continued the other, "They admit no liability at all, but in consideration of your son's services they wish to present you with a certain sum as compensation."

Mr. White dropped his wife's hand, and rising to his feet, gazed with a look of horror at his visitor. His dry lips shaped the words, "How much ?"

"Two hundred pounds," was the answer.

Unconscious of his wife's shriek, the old man smiled faintly, put out his hand like a sightless man, and dropped, a senseless heap to the floor.

## III

In the huge new cemetery, some two miles distant, the old people buried their dead, and came back to a house steeped in shadow and silence. It was all over so quickly that at first they could hardly realize it, and remained in a state of expectation as though something else would happen—something else which was to lighten this load, too heavy for old hearts to bear. But the days passed, and expectation gave place to resignation—the hopeless resignation of the old, sometimes miscalled apathy. Sometimes they hardly exchanged a word, for now they had nothing to talk about, and their days were long in weariness.

It was about a week after that the old man, waking suddenly in the night, stretched out his hand and found himself alone. The room was in darkness, and the sound of subdued weeping came from the window. He raised himself in bed and listened.

"Come back," he said tenderly. "You will be cold."

"It is colder for my son," said the old woman, and wept afresh.

The sound of her sobs died away on his ears. The bed was warm and his eyes heavy with sleep. He dozed fitfully, and then slept until a sudden wild cry from his wife awoke him with a start.

"The monkey's paw !" she cried wildiy. "The



monkey's paw !”

He started up in alarm. “Where ? Where is it ? What's the matter ?”

She came stumbling across the room towards him. “I want it,” she said quietly, “You've not destroyed it ?”

“It's in the parlour, on the bracket,” he replied, marvelling.

“Why ?”

She cried and laughed together, and bending over, kissed his cheek.

“I only just thought of it,” she said hysterically.

“Why didn't I think of it before ? Why didn't you think of it ?”

“Think of what ?” he questioned.

“The other two wishes,” she replied rapidly. “We've only had one.”

“Was not that enough ?” he demanded fiercely.

“No,” she cried triumphantly; “we'll have one more. Go down and get it quickly, and wish our boy alive again.”

The man sat up in bed and flung the bed clothes from his quaking limbs. “Good God, you are mad !” he cried, aghast.

“Get it,” she panted; “get it quickly, and wish —Oh, my boy, my boy !”

Her husband struck a match and lit the candle. “Get back to bed,” he said unsteadily. “You don't

know what you are saying."

"We had the first wish granted," said the old woman feverishly, "why not the second?"

"A coincidence," stammered the old man.

"Go and get it and wish," cried the old woman, and dragged him towards the door.

He went down in the darkness, and felt his way to the parlour, and then to the mantelpiece. The talisman was in its place, and a horrible fear that the unspoken wish might bring his mutilated son before him ere he could escape from the room seized upon him, and he caught his breath as he found that he had lost the direction of the door. His brow cold with sweat, he felt his way round the table, and groped along the wall until he found himself in the small passage with the unwholesome thing in his hand.

Even his wife's face seemed changed as he entered the room. It was white and expectant, and to his fears seemed to have an unnatural look upon it. He was afraid of her.

"Wish!" she cried, in a strong voice.

"It is foolish and wicked," he faltered.

"Wish!" repeated his wife.

He raised his hand. "I wish my son alive again."

The talisman fell to the floor, and he regarded it shudderingly. Then he sank trembling into a chair as the old woman, with burning eyes, walked

to the window and raised the blind.

He sat until he was chilled with the cold, glancing occasionally at the figure of the old woman peering through the window. The candle end, which had burnt below the rim of the china candlestick, was throwing pulsating shadows on the ceiling and walls, until, with a flicker larger than the rest, it expired. The old man, with an unspeakable sense of relief at the failure of the talisman, crept back to his bed, and a minute or two afterwards the old woman came silently and lay apathetically beside him.

Neither spoke, but both lay silently listening to the ticking of the clock. A stair creaked, and a squeaky mouse scurried noisily through the wall. The darkness was oppressive, and after lying for some time screwing up his courage, the husband took the box of matches, and striking one, went down stairs for a candle.

At the foot of the stairs the match went out, and he paused to strike another, and at the same moment a knock, so quiet and stealthy as to be scarcely audible, sounded on the front door.

The matches fell from his hand. He stood motionless, his breath suspended until the knock was repeated. Then he turned and fled swiftly back to his room, and closed the door behind him. A third knock sounded through the house.

"*What's that ?*" cried the old woman, starting up.

"A rat," said the old man, in shaking tones  
"—a rat. It passed me on the stairs."

His wife sat up in bed listening. A loud knock resounded through the house.

"It's Herbert !" she screamed, "It's Herbert !"

She ran to the door, but her husband was before her, and catching her by the arm, held her tightly.

"What are you going to do ?" she cried, struggling mechanically. "I forgot it was two miles away. What are you holding me for ? Let go. I must open the door."

"For God's sake don't let it in," cried the old man, trembling.

"You're afraid of your own son," she cried, struggling.

"Let me go. I'm coming, Herbert ; I'm coming."

There was another knock, and another. The old woman with a sudden wrench broke free and ran from the room. Her husband followed to the landing, and called after her appealingly as she hurried downstairs. He heard the chain rattle back and the bottom bolt drawn slowly and stiffly from the socket. Then the old woman's voice, strained and panting.

"The bolt," she cried loudly. "Come down. I can't reach it."

But her husband was on his hands and knees

groping wildly on the floor in search of paw. If he could only find it before the thing outside got in. A perfect fusillade of knocks reverberated through the house, and he heard the scraping of a chair as his wife put it down in the passage against the door. He heard the creaking of the bolt as it came slowly back, and at the same moment he found the monkey's paw, and frantically breathed his third and last wish.

The knocking ceased suddenly, although the echoes of it were still in the house. He heard the chair drawn back and the door opened. A cold wind rushed up the staircase, and a long loud wail of disappointment and misery from his wife gave him courage to run down to her side, and then to the gate beyond. The street lamp flickering opposite shone on a quiet and deserted road.

—*W. W. Jacobs.*

## 7. THREE QUESTIONS

It once occurred to a certain King, that if he always knew the right time to begin everything; if he knew who were the right people to listen to and whom to avoid ; and, above all, if he always knew what was the most important thing to do, he would never fail in anything he might undertake.

And this thought having occurred to him, he had it proclaimed throughout his kingdom that he would give a great reward to anyone who would teach him what was the right time for every action, and who were the most necessary people, and how he might know what was the most important thing to do.

And learned men came to the King, but they all answered his questions differently.

In reply to the first question, some said that to know the right time for every action one must draw up in advance, a table of days, months, and years, and must live strictly according to it. Only thus, said they, could everything be done at its proper time. Others declared that it was impossible to decide beforehand the right time for every action ; but that, not letting oneself be absorbed in idle pastimes, one should always attend to all that was going

on and then do what was most needful. Others, again, said that however attentive the King might be to whatever was going on, it was impossible for one man to decide correctly the right time for every action, but that he should have a Council of wise men who would help him to fix the proper time for everything.

But then again others said there were some things which could not wait to be laid before a Council, but about which one had at once to decide whether to undertake them or not. But in order to decide that, one must know beforehand what was going to happen. It is only magicians who know that ; and, therefore, in order to know the right time for every action, one must consult magicians.

Equally various were the answers to the second question. Some said, the people the King most needed were his councillors ; others, the priests ; others, the doctors ; while some said the warriors were the most necessary.

To the third question, as to what was the most important occupation ; some replied that the most important thing in the world was silence. Others said it was skill in warfare ; and others, again, that it was religious worship.

All the answers being different, the King agreed with none of them and gave the reward to none. But still wishing to find the right answers to his questions,

he decided to consult a hermit widely renowned for his wisdom.

The hermit lived in a wood which he never quitted, and he received none but common folk. So the King put on simple clothes, and before reaching the hermit's cell dismounted from his horse, and, leaving his bodyguard behind, went on alone.

When the King approached, the hermit was digging the ground in front of his hut. Seeing the King, he greeted him and went on digging. The hermit was frail and weak, and each time he stuck his spade into the ground and turned a little earth, he breathed heavily.

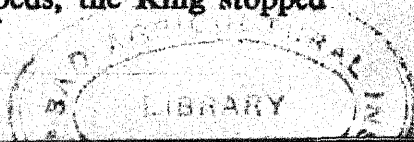
The King went up to him and said : "I have come to you, wise hermit, to ask you to answer three questions : How can I learn to do the right thing at the right time ? Who are the people I most need, and to whom should I, therefore, pay more attention than to the rest ? And what affairs are the most important, and need my first attention ?"

The hermit listened to the King, but answered nothing. He just spat on his hand and recommenced digging.

"You are tired," said the King, "let me take the spade and work awhile for you."

"Thanks !" said the hermit, and, giving the spade to the King, he sat down on the ground.

When he had dug two beds, the King stopped





and repeated his questions. The hermit again gave no answer, but rose, stretched out his hand for the spade, and said :

“Now rest a while....and let me work a bit.”

But the King did not give him the spade, and continued to dig. One hour passed, and then another. The sun began to sink behind the trees, and the King at last stuck the spade into the ground and said : “I came to you, wise man, for answers to my questions. If you can give me none, tell me so and I will return home.”

“Here comes someone running,” said the hermit, “let us see who it is.”

The King turned round, and saw a bearded man come running out of the wood. The man held his hands pressed against the stomach, and blood was flowing from under them. When he reached the King, he fell fainting on the ground moaning feebly. The King and the hermit unfastened the man's clothing. There was a large wound in his stomach. The King washed it as best he could, and bandaged it with his handkerchief and with a towel the hermit had. But the blood would not stop flowing, and the King again and again removed the bandage soaked with warm blood, and washed and rebandaged the wound. When at last the blood ceased flowing, the man revived and asked for something to drink. The King brought fresh water and gave it to him. Mean-

while the sun had set, and it had become cool. So the King, with the hermit's help carried the wounded man into the hut and laid him on the bed. Lying on the bed the man closed his eyes and was quiet ; but the King was so tired with his walk and with the work he had done, that he crouched down on the threshold, and also fell asleep—so soundly that he slept all through the short summer night. When he awoke in the morning, it was long before he could remember where he was or who was the strange bearded man lying on the bed and gazing intently at him with shining eyes.

"Forgive me !" said the bearded man in a weak voice, when he saw that the King was awake and was looking at him.

"I do not know you, and have nothing to forgive you for," said the King.

"You do not know me, but I know you. I am that enemy of yours who swore to revenge himself on you, because you executed his brother and seized his property. I knew you had gone alone to see the hermit, and I resolved to kill you on your way back. But the day passed and you did not return. So I came out from my ambush to find you and I came upon your body-guard and they recognized me and wounded me. I escaped from them, but should have bled to death had you not dressed my wounds. I wished to kill you, and you have saved my life.

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Now, if I live, and if you wish it, I will serve you as your most faithful slave and will bid my sons do the same. Forgive me !”

The King was very glad to have made peace with his enemy so easily, and to have gained him for a friend, and he not only forgave him, but said he would send his servants and his own physician to attend to him, and promised to restore his property.

Having taken leave of the wounded man, the King went out into the porch and looked around for the hermit. Before going away he wished once more to beg an answer to the questions he had put. The hermit was outside, on his knees, sowing seeds in the beds that had been dug the day before.

The King approached him, and said :

“For the last time, I pray you to answer my questions, wise man.”

“You have already been answered,” said the hermit still crouching on his thin legs, and looking up at the King, who stood before him.

“How answered ? What do you mean ?” asked the King.

“Do you not see” replied the hermit, “if you had not pitied my weakness yesterday and had not dug these beds for me, but had gone your way, that man would have attacked you and you would have repented for not having stayed with me. So the most important time was when you were digging the beds ;

and I was the most important man ; and to do me good was your most important business. Afterwards when that man ran to us, the most important time was when you were attending to him, for if you had not bound up his wounds he would have died without having made peace with you. So he was the most important man, and what you did for him was your most important business. Remember then : there is only one time that is important—Now ! It is the most important time because it is the only time when we have any power. The most necessary man is he with whom you are, for no man knows whether he will ever have dealings with anyone else : and the most important affair is, to do him good, because for that purpose alone was man sent into this life !”

—Leo Tolstoy.



## NOTES

### 1. THE LOST CHILD

Mulk Raj Anand is one of the greatest master of English fiction and short-story in our country. He has the artistic vision of Sharat, the socio-political consciousness of Prem Chand, and the soft touch of the heart of Tagore. He depicts in his writings, life in India in general and life in the Punjab in particular. Most of his stories paint the life of the lower class or lower-middle-class. His short stories are very delightful and charming.

*The Lost Child* is a masterpiece and has been considered as one of the greatest short stories of the world. In it he depicts the working of the mind of a child lost in a village fair.

*Gaily clad humanity*—a crowd of people dressed in colourful and gaudy clothes.

*Warren*—a piece of ground infested by the rabbits.

*Quelled*—suppressed.

*Chaperon*—an elderly woman incharge of a girl on social occasions. Her duty is to see that the girl behaves properly. Here the shadows of large trees are likened to chaperons and blushing flowers to little girls.

*Whirlpool of the fair*—the fair is likened to a whirlpool because of the surging crowd going round and round.

*An architecture of many-coloured sweets*—sweets of different colours arranged in various shapes, such as pyramids, arches, etc.



*Round-about—merry-go-round.*

*Disconsolate find—the child who was not consoled*

### Questions

1. Write a note on the psychological element in the story 'The Lost Child.'
2. What makes you like the story 'The Lost Child' ?
3. Reproduce the story 'The Lost Child' in your own words.
4. Do you think that the behaviour of the lost child has been realistically painted by Mulk Raj Anand ?
5. Describe the condition of the child after he had lost his parents in the fair.
6. Bring out the element of pathos in 'The Lost Child'.

## 2. THE DIAMOND NECKLACE

Guy de Maupassant (1850-93) is universally acknowledged as one of the greatest short story writers. He wrote in French and his stories give us a realistic picture of a vast and varied section of the French middle class and peasantry. They are highly polished, beautifully finished and perfect masterpieces. Maupassant was not interested in complex psychological studies. He deals rather with ordinary incidents of life, and reveals through them the 'inner man.'

*The Diamond Necklace* is one of the best stories of Maupassant. The story shows how fate or mischance plays a trick with Loisel and Mathilde and makes them prematurely old.

*Breton*—an inhabitant of Brittany (in France).

*Nanterre*—a town near Paris.

*Seine*—the name of a river.

*Rue des Martyrs*—the Martyr's Street.

*Champs Elysees*—a well-known place for walking (in Paris).

### Questions

1. Give a critical appreciation of the story.
2. Sketch briefly the character of Mathilde Loisel.
3. Tell the story in your own words.
4. 'Maupassant observes life, he does not interpret it.'

Comment upon this statement with special reference to this story.

5. What part does chance play in the story ?

### 3. THE VICTORY

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was born in a rich and distinguished family of Calcutta. After a brief education in India, he was sent to England to study law, but he was destined to be a literary man and not a lawyer. In literature he shone like bright star. He wrote poems, novels, plays and short stories. He was awarded Nobel Prize for his 'Gitanjali', a collection of short poems. It was not as a poet only that he was recognised by the world. As a short story writer also he ranks with the greatest masters of the art. His short stories are permeated with the true Indian spirit. They reflect his philosophic detachment, his artistic vision, his grasp of reality, his love of man.

*The Victory* is one of his best stories. It is beautiful and touching as a lyric, and reveals to us the highly sensitive soul of a poet.

*Muse*—here it stands for the goddess of poetry. In Greek mythology the Muses were known as the nine daughters of Jupiter and Mnemosyne, each one presiding over some kind of fine art.

*Vrinda forest*—Vrindaban is near Mathura. It is a place intimately associated with the life of Lord Krishna.

### Questions

1. Who is the true poet and the victor, Shekhar or Pundarik ?
  2. Describe the story 'The Victory' in your own words.
  3. Write a note on the pathos in the story.
  4. Why does the story appeal to you ?
  5. Give a vivid description of the last scene in the story.
  6. Do you agree with the judgment of Princess Ajita ?
- Why ?

### 4. AN ASTROLOGER'S DAY

R. K. Narayan is one of the greatest living writers of our country. He is in many ways the most artistic of Indian short story writers in English. He has deliberately fashioned his stories after the manner of the great Russian writer, Anton Tchekhov. We find in his stories the same kind of humour and irony, and the same kind of brilliant beginning. He can also, like Tchekhov, build up a climax within a very short space. His style is noted for its economy of detail and purity, *An Astrologer's Day* is a very fine specimen of his exquisite art.

*Astrology*—the science that tries to find out the influence of stars on human fate.

*The stars*—some people hold that the stars and heavenly bodies exercise a great influence on the life of a man. An astrologer studies these influences.

*Vendor*—wayside seller of a thing.

*Paraphernalia*—personal belongings, such as equipments, etc.

*Saturn*—a star.

*Green shaft*—a beam of rays of green light.

*Pyol*—stalks of rice plant.

### Questions

1. Give a character-sketch of the astrologer.
2. Reproduce the story in your own words.
3. Give the appreciation of the story.
4. Where is the climax of the story ? How does the story end ? Is the end of the story well managed ?

### 5. GOD LIVES IN THE PANCH

Prem Chand (1880-1937) was a well-known literary figure of India, both in Hindi and Urdu literature. He wrote wonderful novels and short stories in Hindi. His stories of village-life in the U.P. are the best of their kind. Though he is called a king among novelists, his stories excel even his novels in art and finish. In his story *God Lives in the Panch* entitled in Hindi as *Panch Parmeshwar* he has shown in a masterly way how a Panch rises above worldly relations when he sits as a judge. He makes the readers feel how responsibilities awaken the conscience in man.

*Of the stars*—of fate.

*Dotingly*—with a great regard and love.

*Barb*—arrow.

*Crest fallen*—mortified by defeat or failure.

*Tartly*—abruptly—सीधेपन से ।

*Mince-meat*—to hackle.

### Questions

1. Narrate the story in your own words.
2. Do you like this story ? If so, why ?
3. Write a note on the life of the Indian village, as depicted in the story.
4. 'An awakened conscience puts up with nothing that is unfair'. Discuss.

### 6. THE MONKEY'S PAW

W. W. Jacobs (1863-1944) was born in London. For some years he held a post in the Saving Bank Department of the post office. Then he devoted himself to writing. He wrote a lot about sea-life.

He is known as a short story writer and a playwright. His short stories generally relate to shipping and sailors.

But his most celebrated story, *The Monkey's Paw* belongs to a different class. It deals with the supernatural which has nothing to do with the type which Jacobs made his own. It is a horror story most artistically told.

*Without*—outside.

*Check*—a term used in chess, indicating threat to the opponent's king.

*Mate*—announcement to opponent of inextricable check of king at chess.

*Slushy*—muddy.

*Rubicand of visage*—red-faced.

*Mummy*—a dried dead body.

*Presumptuous*—daring, bold.

*Talisman*—a thing with magical power.

*Gruffly*—roughly.

*Enthralled*—entranced, absorbed.

*Henpecked*—ruled by the woman one is married to.

*Shriveled*—dried up.

*Of bibulous habits*—in the habit of drinking hard.

*Mutilated*—deprived of limbs.

*Wrench*—violent twist or sideways pull.

*Fusillade*—long and continuous firing of guns; here it means a succession of knocks.

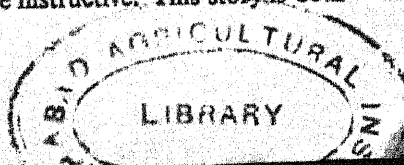
*Reverberated*—echoed.

### Questions

1. "An atmosphere of horror and terror runs all through the story *The Monkey's Paw*" ; elucidate.
2. Reproduce the story in your own words.
3. Does this story appeal to you ? If so, why ?
4. How does the supernatural element add to the effect of the story ?

### 7. THREE QUESTIONS

*Count Leo Tolstoy* (1828-1919), one of the greatest novelist and short story writers of the world, was born in Russia in a noble family. His most famous novles are : *War and Peace*, *'Anna Karenina'*, and *'The Resurrection'*. He was not only a great novelist but also a social reformer and a moralist. That is why most of his short stories are instructive. This story is both instructive and delightful.



*Pastimes*—recreations ; amusements.

*Council*—a body of advisers.

*Common folk*—poor and humble persons ; men holding ordinary position in life.

*Gazing intently*—looking closely with a purpose.

*Ambush*—hiding place.

*Crouching*—bending low.

### Questions

1. What were the three questions to which the king sought an answer ? What answers did the people give to those questions ?
2. What happened when the king was with the hermit ?
3. Write a note on the moral of the story.
4. Write a critical appreciation of the story.